

MEMORIAL
OF
J. S. SKINNER,
PRAYING

The establishment of an Agricultural Department of government.

APRIL 11, 1848.

Referred to the Committee on Agriculture, and ordered to be printed.

To the Congress of the United States:

The undersigned, a devoted, and for thirty years, according to his poor abilities, active friend of agriculture, the "nurse and mother of all the arts," respectfully solicits an appropriation, to be applied, under the direction of the State governments respectively, or otherwise, as may be deemed most expedient by your honorable body, to the establishment of institutions for instruction in geology, mineralogy, and vegetable and animal physiology; in civil engineering, as applied to road-making, bridge-building, and other rural architecture; and also to instruction in the mechanical principles on which depend the labor-saving properties and efficiency of agricultural implements and machinery; an appropriation which, in a word, by insuring a more skilful employment of agricultural labor and capital, will so far augment our solid wealth and power, and thus promote the general welfare and "true glory" of the country.

It is on all hands admitted that the recent brilliant achievements of our arms in fields of battle and blood have in a great measure resulted from the application of science to the art of war, as *taught by government* in our military schools. An experienced general lately stated, at a public festival in honor of our "heroes" returning from the war, that under the direction of officers thus educated out of the general treasure, contributed mainly by the landed interest, "the whole militia of the United States might be converted into well-disciplined soldiers in 60 days." Not doubting the accuracy of his judgment, is there any reason why, in schools as well organized and supported by government, the same increased efficiency should not be communicated to the art of agriculture as to that of war? Is not the former as susceptible of improvement as the latter, by the application to it of the appropriate sciences? It was the remark of the great agricultural writer of antiquity: "When I consider this art generally, and view it as comprehending a subject of vast extent, and then descend to the consideration of the parts which compose its totality, I fear that I shall reach the term of my life before I shall acquire a complete knowledge of it." In like manner, Liebig, the most distinguished of modern discoverers in scientific husbandry, has declared that on the application of the appropriate sciences "agriculture must hereafter depend *for all material improvement.*"

It will hardly be urged that Congress has *no power* to provide, in this more efficient mode, for the diffusion of agricultural knowledge, since it does now, annually and without scruple, exert that power by the agency of a bureau of one of the departments of the government, for the partial dissemination of agricultural essays and statistics. If this exercise of the power, and this use of the public money, be not expressly for public instruction, what sort of exertion of power is it, and for what purpose intended? But while it constitutes a palpable recognition of the principle, how unworthy is it, in scope and efficiency, of so great an object as that of exhibiting the condition and *enlightening the practice* of that great branch of national industry which, as Gibbon truly asserts, "is the foundation of all manufactures, since the productions of nature are the *materials of art*."

Now that we are once more blessed with a prospect of peace, will not the planters and farmers, whom you represent, begin to take alarm at the enormous increase of expenditure for our military establishments; and to compare the *proportion* which these expenditures bear to all other disbursements for the support of the government of this Union? Have not the people of the country employed in rural industry, on whose consumption so large an amount of the public treasure is collected, a right to demand of their representatives how it is, that during the eight years of Washington's administration the whole expense of our military establishments amounted only to \$11,000,000; whereas, during a recent similar period of 8 years, ending in 1843, it amounted to \$164,000,000? Then as to the *proportion* of expenses in time of peace—and independent of the war with Mexico—have not the people who are indirectly taxed for it a right to call upon their Representatives in Congress to know how it is that 80 per cent. of the whole cost of government is contracted on account of our *military disbursements*?

The proportion of military expenditures to that of the whole cost of government besides, is in *Austria* 33 per cent.; in *France*, 38; in *Prussia*, 44; in *England*, 74; and in the *republic of the United States*, with no oppressed and discontented people to keep in subjection by the fear of the bayonet, and so far away removed as we are from all danger of invasion, we yet take \$80 out of every \$100 collected from the people, to keep up our military establishments and preparations for war.

It is respectfully prayed of your honorable body to instruct your Agricultural Committees (who are doubtless wide awake to the great *preponderating* interest committed to *their* charge) to inquire and report upon the accuracy of these statements, and to instruct them to see whether the annual cost of maintaining one ship-of-the-line (more than \$200,000) would not be all-sufficient to establish a Normal School, for the glorious purposes here designated, in every State of the Union! Or, if deemed better, one or more national schools, like that at West Point, from which pupils might go forth charged with agricultural science, to enlighten the course of the plough in every State, except that its *élèves* would not receive commissions for life, with assurance of promotion and higher pay from government. By a table of the expenditures of the United States, exclusive of payments on account of the public debt, it appears that in fifty-three years, from the formation of our present government in 1789 down to 1843, there have been \$246,620,055 spent for civil purposes, comprehending the expenses of the executive, the legislature, the judiciary, the post office, light-houses, and intercourse with foreign governments. During the same period there have

been \$368,526,594 devoted to the military establishment, and \$170,437,684 to the naval establishment, forming an aggregate of \$538,964,278. Deducting from this sum the appropriations during three years of war with England, and we shall find that more than \$400,000,000 were absorbed by vain preparations, in time of peace, for war, which such preparations are often found to be much more apt to invite, or to bring on, than to avert. While the national wealth derived from agriculture (\$654,387,597) is three times greater than that from manufacturing industry, its national and friendly ally, and nearly five times greater than that derived from all the other industries united, how little do we hear of the action of Congress in reference to a pursuit by which all others live, and move, and have their being! It has been comparatively but a few years since committees were even appointed to watch over it; and how little have we heard from them! Where are their reports, their projects of law for *its* protection and advancement? But without going into any further illustration of the rights of agriculture to the highest and most especial consideration of government, its friends feel that they have a right to demand—for enlightening this great pursuit—at least as much of the public treasure as is given for the support of naval and military schools now maintained for improvement in the science of war. Nor can it be believed that an enlightened nation, having a just perception of its true interest and glory, will hesitate to decide that it is at least as wise and beneficent to pay taxes to insure honorable distinction, improvement, and profit to the great, peaceful, and civilizing employment of mankind, as to promote skill and success in the use of the cannon and the sword. The highest perfection of agriculture everywhere indicates and promotes the highest state of civilization.

In excuse for assuming to speak as one humble interpreter of the rights and wants of American agriculturists, it may be said that they possess not the means of concentrating and giving expression to their views that other classes enjoy, and on all occasions *so promptly exercise*. Not a law is proposed that affects the interest of the merchant or the manufacturer, that does not strike a chord of sympathy, which gives notice to all concerned, and brings them together to vindicate and defend their common interests. For the guardianship of all that relates to the *army* and the *navy*, special departments are supported at enormous expense and at the cost of the planter and the farmer, in the great proportion that the revenue of the government is derived from taxes on their consumption. If the recommendation of the Father of his Country to establish also a department of agriculture had been carried out, agriculturists, too, might have enjoyed some share of that attention which is now engrossed by special institutions and classes; but as it is, their concerns are overlooked, as is always the case when it is everybody's business and nobody's to look after them.

Under these circumstances, it is hoped that this expression of what he feels to be their just rights and reasonable demands may not be deemed presumptuous on the part of an humble citizen, who for thirty years has not allowed a week or scarcely a day to pass without prosecuting some inquiry, or contributing in some form, according to his poor abilities, to advance this most important and most neglected industry of the country.

All which is respectfully submitted.

J. S. SKINNER.

NEW YORK, *March 18, 1848.*

